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THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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THESEUS

What would the child have known of father-king?
Only his mother, left long years ago,
To nurse him and her own remembering,
And strangest patrimony in a stone
Too great to move. What could the boy have known
But exultation when his hard arms heaved
The massive stone at last, and he beheld
His father's sword pointing the way to Athens?

Some madness raged in him that he must leave
Dead murderers like milestones on the way.
Ambitious boy! to slay Periphetes,
Rip Sinis all asunder and move on,
Athens-bound, to send the wicked Sciron
Screaming from a cliff into the sea,
To wrestle Cercyon into his grave
And lay Procrustes dead in his own bed.

More than mere ambition led him on
Through dread amazement to the Minotaur
And triumph over that most potent male.
Far older fury than the youth could know
Ignored the promised token of a sail
And hurled the king of Athens to the sea.

Robert Lowenherz

ON GOING

Twenty-one Short Poems

1. In sum
 all such
words come
 to not so
much
 as go.
2. Home, white
 bird, to the Holy
Ghost's white
 whiskers.
3. O take a soft
 comb and comb
folklore from
 the baby's hair.
4. Do you go
 yellow when
the moon
 is full?
5. If Cousin Mary Martha's got
 no more sense than to marry a sot
she *ought* to have lumbago.
6. The green flame answers
 or the blue one
 or the yellow.
7. Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,
 they beat me with a belt
every living night.

Do you believe they're right?
I help fight polio
and use your oleo.
I love your column. P.S.
how have you found happiness?

8. Nothing will persuade the
green cow to come down out
 of her refuge tree.

9. Around _____ of applause O
three cheers for _____
_____ G.W.G. Ferris: go
nowhere on his wheel.

10. Particular
but abstract stars
have perished into
dark mirrors.

11. Smoking leaves
an after-odor
in the drapes
and ashes shaped
like gravestones
in the dish.

12. The sun dreams
blueprints of
the perfect fern.

13. A
Negro shook
my hand:

look
away,
Dixieland.

14. Least still
things no
one looks
at look
at him.

15. Piano walks
on three
legs. Shall we
waltz?

16. Of five like birds
flying over,
which one spoke?

17. Excuse
me, spider whose
web I just tore
through.
Furthermore,
God curse you.

18. How go the
bittersweet
tears?
Silverquick.

19. Bear
burning smoke
of sulphur
to be brimstar
born.

20. Chicago is
hog enough:
go home.

21. All
things grow
small
lest these
least poems
go.

William Harmon

STONE MOUNTAIN

" . . . a massive dome of bald granite, said to be the largest in the world, in DeKalb Co., Georgia, about 16 miles E. of Atlanta. It rises about 700 feet above the comparatively level surrounding country, and its visible bulk has been estimated as over 7,000,000,000 cubic feet. In 1920, commissioned by the State, Gutzon Borglum (q.v.) started a heroic carving in bas-relief on the north face of the rock as a memorial to the Confederacy. In 1925 he was replaced by the sculptor Augustus Lukeman." *The New Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia.*

Gray obstinacy, property of geologic age,
Beacon abandoned in the crunch of ice
And snow and frozen desolation, void of life,
Unconscious of bone and blood, the human tone;
First Ararat, perhaps, had there been soil or growth
Whereon to hang breath, the airy nothing
Intermitting between mankind and you.
Deadness absolute, neutrality of nature,
You neither run, nor fall, nor shine, nor change;
Durance is your sole intent, survival of the basic.
You fought with immobility that other gray
Of which they tried to make you symbol.

Borglum wept frustration when you could not be
made

To cuddle Lee, Davis, Jackson,
Though Rushmore joyed in Washington, Jefferson,
and Lincoln.

Lukeman brought dynamite to scar your side,
But failed to be physician to provincial ills.
Fragmented Lee achieves a bare and partial look,
A half-man astride a steed that has no eyes and rides
nowhere;

He would have cleft a nation, nave to chaps,
And no white beard or snowy head could hide so
green a wound.

The lichens bind his lips, and Jeff and Jack
Cannot break clear of U. D. C. encrusted granite.
Perhaps Lukeman knew; he came down from his
scaffold

And seemed to live. Though the timbers rotted,
Grandsons sat in camelia comfort and stuffed their
sons

With cotton valor in a coca-cola world.

On occasion youth has mounted Lukeman's relic
stairs

To be awakened by the feather snap of weathered
wood

And screams self-made upon jagged scraps below,
Embryonic epitaph before a hall of memory never
made.

But men too have an immobility and stubborn sides;
So they will try again to elevate a hundred years of
loss,

To shroud in star-crossed bars narcissic admiration,
While their bleached-field-hand voices unctuate
That whiteness is all, in the glacial wastes of geologic
certitude.

John C. Stephens

CHIRSTMAS NIGHT TRAIN

I pack my child up and take her hurtling
On a train across the cold and windy continent,
Bearing that little life like a fragile dish
To let the mother of her mother say some words
To as much as she will ever know of eternity.

We go flying through snow drifts in cold moonlight,
Bearing the child to her mother's mother,
And I sit in the dark with other dark fathers and
 mothers
Going to visit other fathers and mothers.

All night as the train rattles and veers
I watch in the darkness the movements of travellers,
Outlines against steamed windows and dim lights:
One woman carries five children to her mother
(Five times as much eternity to hope for),
And five times this night she bears hugging boys
The length of the brawling coach to the rest room.
Between times she answers their little night cries
And goes to the rest room herself (no little peace)
While all the other shapes stir and rub their eyes.

I awake to the morning light vaguely
Through the dim and dripping windows.
I awake thinking about eternity
While my eyes glide along the telephone wires
Drifting like a bird dropping to rest,
Now dropping below them with a baffling train drop.

So Elysium is here, or a little after,
And I must bear a bluff eternity on a long train ride,
With children bear Elysium home to parents.

Robert Lewis Weeks

FISHING, FATHER ALWAYS SAID DON'T SHOUT

Fishing, Father always said Don't shout,
Don't talk, it scares the fish away. The woman
Idling a bamboo pole over the pier
Eyed me crossly from underneath her bonnet,
Too boarded up inside her private protests
To whisper SSH, however viciously.

But we were gliding from her shaded frown
To quiet, liquid nowheres, rocking gently
In our thin cradle, parting the very swell
Of breathing Death, into whose darkening
Depths I peered, through my reflection, to
Another parting: half-secret flash, three,
Four, far down; then darkness, and no flash.

No word from Father, who had laid the oar,
Casting his thought across the water, then reeling
It in—a whizzing sound; but still I peered
Over the boat and down into the silence,
Knowing it was fish who fled; and heard
Echoing in the glassy hollows of my mind:
O dear and friendly fish! flee! flee!

For in reality they are my brothers;
Here, where afternoons are blue and cold
As milk, where the turning of a fin
May well deliver one from danger, or one
May hide among the pink anemones.

Amorphous place of green and even lights:
Hope to see no more than fancy hooks
Near any black spot in our silvered ceiling.
Hope not to see a net; hope that no man

Falls swallowed, breathing bubbles horrible
And bright, upon our clean and easy floor:
For all these bridges built of sand are our paradise;
We have everything to lose, and more.

Robert Grant Burns

THE AGED WINO'S COUNSEL TO A YOUNG MAN ON THE BRINK OF MARRIAGE

A two-quart virgin in my lap,
with hands that shook I peeled her cap
and filched a kiss. It warmed me so,
I raised my right hand, swore *I do*—
we welded flesh, I and she,
in mutual indignity.

Now when I hear of wives that freeze,
bitter of lip, with icebound knees,
who play high-card for social bets
and lose, and feed you carp croquettes,
who nap all day, who yak all night
what Ruth told Min—now which was right?—
who count with glee your falling hairs
but brood a week on one of theirs,
who'll see your Parker House poke out
before they take a stitch, who pout
at change of moon, as I hear tell,
I say, son, wed you half as well.

X. J. Kennedy

D.A.R.ling

The Daughters (sic)
of the American Revolution
(’76 was ago nine score and four
and all appearances notwithstanding
you know they couldn’t *really* be)
But yank a doodle dandy!
the ladies still preserved preserve
(it says right here in my sources)
the memory of those bright souls
who thumbed their gorge at Uncle George
and clobbered all the *status quo*.
So let us ever thankful be
for service duly rendered.
Old Thomas Paine of common sense
to comprehend the crisis
would, one supposes, be forgot
long since, had these dear ladies not
kept his rebellious name a torch.
And that staunch leader of the rabble
(a plague on your pickled red herrings!)
Dark Crispus. Where would be his fame now, think
you,
had not the flame of his memory
been tended so selflessly by these?
(Name us your own rogue’s gallery.)
Go to! I say they are not sweet mummies,
Nor barnacles on ship of state.
Salute these *filia*!
I deny categorically that they are necro.
A good revolutionist these days is hard to find.

Ray Mizer

THE QUARRY

(Pygmalion)

This is the place, I think. Here, let me take
Your hand. Sharp white fragments of stone awake
At our approach, and I would not have one
Bit of you bruised before the task is done
And morning smoothes the edges of these trees.
Come, do not be afraid of dark. You please
Me still. You think I cannot see your face.
But I have learned the line-work of your frown,
Intricacy of every terror-trace,
Gouge of the stricken lip that cannot line
Fear with a scream. Shall I forget? Shall I?
Why do you weep! Tears did not sway the stone
Pillars whereat you lately sought advice . . .
Here is the place we'll bare down to the bone
Endurable days and nights you've prattled of.
Are you surprised? Here is the mound where love
Flowed in the light, where marble turned to dust.
I never made the thing I could not trust.

Your fingers sculpt my palm. You can recall,
I think, the morning you awoke to tall
Trees blocking out the sun? I watched you rise
Slowly from where you'd slept. I knew surprise
Was not what one might wish, who had travelled
How far through stony dark to find this gravel

Of a sculptor's bed! I sighed and sighed.
Could I have known you'd skitter mortified
From slightest praise? Hours you hid (so like
A work of art!) until that bric-a-brac
Of abstract stones, in front of which I crouched,
Drew from your face a smile, and you approached.

I hear you laugh. I could not understand
Your laughter ever. It slips as through the hand
Of an old witch, cupped before her mouth,
Who watched a hopeful youth
Bear off her gift of foul advice beyond
His fellow-creatures . . . I marvel at how fond
You strike me still.

I hear you weep. Retract
Nothing. I shan't. Why flaw the artifact
Of this return? Rise, girl, onto this mound
Into the shaping light where you are crowned
With shame; revel in doubt at what this blanched
Heart asks of you. Pose! Make my hands unclenched
Your flesh made hard! Listen! from this device
They'll wrest you then . . . as they would a sacrifice.

David Galler

CURRENT REASONS FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Because there was no room in the inn, naturalists
Have come up with the notion that He was kind to
animals,

Having been born among them in a kind of catalysis
Even though they don't explain why He ate more
than vegetables.

Because there was no room in the inn, politicians
Have suggested that He made so many poor
Loving them so much more that we should renounce
conditions

Of sovereignty and freedom except for the fewer
and fewer.

Because there was no room in the inn, advertisers
Advise us to wire ahead for a reservation

Even if we have reservations about advisers

Who know what's good for us and our nation.

But thinking about it at this Christmas season,
I feel that there's really an existential reason.

Albert Howard Carter

PARODOS: passio apum

In the height of the honeyflow,
the golden chitined virgin springs
in her perfect sky and rises,
over the summer cyclamen and the white
orchards, scribing her spirals
to the hero-shining sun. She climbs,
she throbs and blurs her wings,
she spurns the mating cage, the greenhouse,
the most careful
plans of scientific men.

Rising glittering
in the light, she draws the drones
in a cloud of singing gold,

war-crested with all
their eyes and following her fragrant voice
with thirty thousand wakened
senses. She rises still, she leaps,
exultant on her wings, beyond,
and higher, till the overreaching drones
collapse exhausted and stagger
homeward dizzy and winglame.

One yet follows
on and rising after,
climbing still
unwearied to the apex of the summer's
noon where she, the quean,

his golden goal, waits
suspended from the sun. On blazing wings
he rides against her breast
and grasps her, as she clasps him now,
with hairy arms and legs.
Embracing face to face they spring

straight upward through the cymbal-
ringing air on the doubled wings
of bodies joined
in the holy rhythm of doom.
Brow to glistening
brow and unarmed mouth
to mouth they rise one

winged creature in their mortal
mating. Too soon the strained
limbs lose their flying
hold and both spent bodies
drop together down the vibrant
hush of noon. As he tries to turn
away from her, the achieving drone
helplessly tears his flesh apart,
gutting his body
to free himself. He falls, not flies,
to earth, to quiver
shattered in the burning field
where his brothers sleep and hum.

And she, crowned now,
rides the accomplished day home
to the hive, bearing in triumph
the surrendered oriflamme of all his life
streaming in her flesh. Now I,
blind in the gardens where the dedicated throng
stores its sweet gold
life and hangs immaculate cities
from heaven, must close
my eyes and lips: for tears,
for praise; caught
in analogies too deep,
too precious for craft.

Suzanne Gross

THE FIG IN WINTER

My train comes in on the lower level
But I have always lived on the aching level.
The other morning a neighbor joined me on the way
to the station—
The station is only the H-T from G.C.—
And asked me how the children were.
Fine, I said, fine,
And they are fine.
Suzanne, seven, does fine work in second grade,
Larry, four, does fine finger painting
And Pete, nine months, has a fine formula and does
mighty fine duty.
My wife is fine, too, but more of her or less of her
later.
And in a manner or several manners of speaking I
am fine.

I am secretary and general counsel or general counsel
and secretary,
Depending on which flipper I put forward,
Of a large company which can buy and sell many
other companies
And frequently does. At a directors' meeting the
other day
The vice-president in charge of operations—
The vice-president in charge of publicity calls him
our medical man—
Brought up a knotty problem.
The president, with his keen eyes keener still,
Spoke at length in favor of affirmative action.
Asked, I said his analysis was keen
But whatever we did now would be misunderstood in
the field

And even a vigorous educational campaign would not
be enough.

Around the table all the directors agreed with me.

Later I wrote up the minutes.

When I think of all the unwritten minutes of small
corporations

I feel sad.

My wife is a television actress or a well known writer
Or an account executive with a good but small
agency.

She is all wool and an inch wide.

Across our lawn at break of dawn

Run Petey, Mikey, Johnny, Hal,

Suzy, Nancy, Betty, Sal,

Stevey, Harry, Danny, Dick,

Patty, Sara, Linda, Vic.

There is always one missing.

The neighbor who brings me home,

Not the neighbor who walks to the station with me,

Lives at the end of our block near the stop-sign

With his wife, a married daughter, the son-in-law,

Three grandchildren and an unmarried son of

thirty-five:

One of the twisted and tormented.

Sometimes I think he sees me plain.

The Bankers Trust serves very good chicken salad,

The Morgan-G. has very good meat,

I had a very nice dessert at the Industrial Bank of
Commerce,

But by and large I have eaten better at the Chase
Manhattan

Than at any bank in town.

The bare wonder is not that he does his work so well

But that he does his work at all.

Where is doctor, where is thumbkin?
And when Suzy was that age and we would say
 "tomorrow night"
She would stamp her foot and say "No, today
 night."

In the last analysis it will probably appear
That Procrustes was the wiser.

I like to see our guests come and go.
Some day I am going to speak to one of them.

Our lawn is wide and spacious,
Our trees grow straight and tall,
The air is clean and sweet.

Nothing weighs more than a commutation ticket.

Henry Stone

THE COCKERELS

Outside my door
six cockerels roar
to be let in.

Their constant din
retards my mind
to hide behind

white drapes and peek
at each bright beak
pecking at grass

and broken glass;
to watch their combs'
red flopping domes

and taloned feet
barbed for defeat—
ing roosters and hens.

If I went out
and picked one up
he would be warm,

his feathers slick;
but I will not.
The young cocks step

in a brown swarm,
and now I pick
three apples up,

raise the window
just a crack
to toss them out.

They roll and stop
as the cockerels run
quickly to snatch

what they can catch.
Six beaks plunge in
through smooth red skin,

the apples go
to bits of show.
With one-eyed sight

six cockerels fight
for pulp and pips.
I bite my lips.

Edith Shiffert

CHESSMAN

When a new child cries

it cries for breath

It takes some time to make a world and if
the world ex-

plodes speak the word

and the world will be there

for a time speak and speak You will be heard

perhaps and that spells breathing

space

for all the pieces of the game

a chessman's place is among other chessmen

each knows his place and all are poised for it

when a new man cries out to It the crime

cries the world back into womandark

from where it all heaved up a checkered

white and black

and the Cry was made flesh

and flesh is there to clutch

so when they hear you you will

be caught

in your own game you'll play and play

you'll jump

this way and that from square to

darkening square

under the eyes of the bishops in their

towers

and the chessboard will shrink
into a cell floor and the flesh will
be reconverted into words
and you'll crouch in your cell till the Queen
closes in and
when mother smothers you there is no
crying for breath

Glauco Cambon

SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS HAVE BEEN ISSUED

Dovekies were blown inland over Newburyport
And signs rattled their slats down Boylston Street.
Rain was mixed to a fine mist by swizzle sticks
Held in drunken fingers of clouds. Squeegee feet
Pressed out momentary imprints on flowing walks,
Legs leaned to the dire northeast and my skin
Huddled closer to the pulp of my body. Tell,
My love, how you keep the winds from crashing in
Beyond the breakers of my adoration.
Weather men predict the storm will last for days.

Dovekies, dashed upon the whiplash shore, will die
As gulls descend with clicking bills. My forays
May dribble out in patters on a puddle
Or stride past startled beggars babbling by rote
Their curses on the rain; but you, I know, will
Step your way with sunlight glinting off your coat.

Stanwood K. Bolton, Jr.

FOUR POEMS

From the Lake

She rose from the lake of that usual summer
through ripples of rowers, rose from the water,
my stardripping darling, lissom in bullrush
and lightspilling lily; moisture and dust,

she came like creation from minnowy mosses
up to my eyes, through turtledark places,
swam to a surface of summer and sameness
diamonding light to brighten my days.

Rowers and spiders kept skimming the scum,
elmleaves and willowleaves shadowed the gleam
where she came stirring circles; gem after gem
dripped from her hair and the tip of her hand.

But what changed? Still there hung in July light
prisms of midges, dragonfly eyes—
swimmers dipped arms in, fishermen dangled
lines in the lake that her rising had spangled.

Trees stayed as graceful, ducks at a distance
paddled like platitudes, sands of indifference
shimmered the shore where her shining foot
touched—
a vision like Venus reaching the beach.

And the air didn't alter with artists to paint her
or flattering Flora, adoring, await her.
Nothing much differed except in the one
her brightness bewitched, myth struck since then.

Harold Witt

Already April

Before I finished March, already April
unpetaled trees midpraise I hoped to keep;
pastel oaks began a jader dapple,
the sun increased and dried the sliding drop.
I saw the snail fatten on the rag
of perforation where perfection was.
I bent in scents of May to clip the rose,
no sooner cut than its exploding cup
shattered along my arm what roses lose.
A bluejay moment and all June was gone;
the beetle tocked half-past goodbyed July.
Kneeling in August Africas of grass,
I dug up stickery stars with milky bloods,
and mid-September, when I straightened up,
October's golden pendulum had struck.
Chrysanthemumed November, stalk by stalk,
poked December sticks before I looked,
but even in the January frost
a February robin hopped the thaw
and I was praising started March again
when April interrupted me with time.

Harold Witt

Again, Again

Again, again I swim
in images of foam
down to the seadrowned town,
under the rim of brine.

I walk the sandribbed times

of saltscent, pelican
(his slack beak skims sardines).
The sea is green as limes.

I hold my breath between
the fishers on the pier
and find my father there,
a pole curved from his hand.

He smiles, he's winding in
a hooked lip dripping gems,
o-eyes, black, immense—
the rest of it is fin.

It struggles among buckets,
it tugs at my childish eye
until I don't quite cry.
My father, big with knuckles,
slaps it into a creel.
The glittering agates rise,
sinker, hook and line
fly whizzing from the wheel.

I run the other way,
I never hear since then
Christ, fisher of men,
except the cruel bait

arcs from my father's hand,
the fooled tail flaps
in a metaphor that gasps
in air where I first drowned.

Harold Witt

Swallows

I swear the swallows talking woke me up,
outside under the eaves, and shadow swallows
winging across white curtains worked and spoke,
skimming like scissors, closed their busy tails—
ask bird experts how their bird feet clung
to an edge of nothing as they dabbed with mud
the abstract outline of a vase-shaped home.

I heard their conversation while they hung—
as if one swallow gave a bird direction
the other answered, and, in swooping loops,
chattered creekward after still more mud.
With feathered patience—not much left of spring—
they modeled their pottery bottle crumb by crumb,
a house in which to hatch a brood of down.

Marvels of monument, miracles of dome—
egg jewel floating in the Roman air
I've gaped and ohed at, but never until now
met at my window two such engineers
starting my morning with a mud alarm
on metal awning, and eavedropped on the view
of architects whispering as when Thebes began.

Harold Witt

STAR IN THE WELL

His body—five months back tall Abraham
Who plowed and sowed, rode herd and mended fence,
But now living sepulcher lodged gaunt
And voiceless in the platform rocker—stared
Out through the window in his sitting room.
He saw the land that needed him to plow,
Now March was mealing winter out of it.
He saw the pulley well he'd meant to fix,
And saw his wife of eight months stomp to it . . .
Sakes, Sheba, sakes, what're you up to now,
First poking at its curb and then its flap?
I know you're madder than a stirred-up hornet
At my will you found today, though eight months
old.

But use your head. Don't toe those planks again.
You know how rotten through they are—you've
known

Since last I looked them over, five months back
And warned my boy and you away from them
Till I could fix them new . . . He saw her whirl
And stomp from sight . . . Five months ago today
I looped that rope around the juniper
Beside the well to hitch about my waist
To hold me safe for ripping out the frame.
The rope still coils there useless just like me.
That was the day I climbed to slide the planks
Down from the woodshed beams but slipped and fell
Hard on the chopping block . . .

“Now, Ike,” he heard
His wife, then on the backporch, stomping at his son
And Abigail's, “you fetch that stovewood in
Right now. Then you can mooncalf for that star
To make a wish on, when it's in the well.”

Abe's wasted fingers snailed all master-pale
About the chair-arms; and his brown eyes moved
In his fixed skull as if *they'd mend* the well . . .
Sakes, Sheba, sakes, you needn't fuss that boy.
He's only five, and good to help. Just give him
Leeway—just a mite—to whack a stick, or think
About his mom. A tyke so much alone
And shy like Isaac takes his boy grief hard.
He needs his own mom more of late—much more—
Than two years back when neighbors buried her.
For now I can't tend ranch so he can trot
Along and look for nest of lark, or scare
Groundhog and rabbit on the rimrock shelf,
Or climb the derrick rope, hand over hand,
Or find a new-born calf or colt for us
To share . . .

He heard her nag the kitchen pump
Until it screeched and rattled, heard her jog
The supper dishes in the sink—then stomp
Into the sitting room. He saw her sharp hand
To the wrist still dripping dishpan suds
Hack down and up. And then her magpie voice
Retched at his ears, "That brat is loading up
His arms with stovewood like he grudged each stick
To me. Now that you mope there like a lump
For me to wait on, hand and foot, and feed,
I'm out of mind to humor him." Abe's eyes
Rolled starey-slow in their fixed skull, yet he
Could see no more than her thin hand chop air
And thud her gingham apron sleezing wet
Across her scrawny hips. "He's on my nerves,
And I've a mind to take a horsewhip to him
Like you never done. Of course, you hadn't to
The way he minded you. I'm not the kind
To dote on him like you." She shook his chair,

In which she'd found his will at noon that day.
"You even dared to make your will with half
To him and only half to me. I thought
Back when you married me, you'd treat me right
Like Abigail—and will it all to me
Just like I know you done for her. Oh yes,
You said in case *he* died, I'd get it all.
Well, Abe, you'll rue this will; just mark my word.
And now I'll take that brat in hand unless
He's fetching—." Stovewood rattled to the woodbox
By the kitchen range. "That sneak's been spooking
us
Again."

She clumped back to the kitchen. Abe
Strained to turn his head. It turned a bit—an inch—
The first time since his fall. He saw his tyke—
Tow head and overalls—on trail this side
The well, slow-gazing at the evening stars
Just coming bright . . . Sakes, Sheba, sakes, don't
wrong

That boy. Don't lay a whip to him this time
Or any time. I couldn't bear it. Don't.
For like I overheard the doctor warn,
A shock'd likely strike me dead—or else,
Just maybe shake me from this living death
To free my son from being sacrificed
Each day to you and me—much more today—
More since you snooped and found my will today . . .
He then heard Sheba, from the kitchen porch
He guessed, half-coax, "Now look into the well
And if your star is down there, make the wish
You said you would to make your daddy well."
Abe saw his son step near it but halt.

"Fraidy cat,
Look in," she dared him nervously. "Look in.

It's sure to be there—now.”

Abe's fingers clutched
The chair-arms harder than he knew . . . No! Don't,
Don't do it, Isaac . . . The words writhed to his throat
And choked there in an unheard gulp. The boy
Stood still (his stare fixed on the rotted boards.
Abe watched him glance back once and step ahead,
Undo the step, stand still and stare at the well.

“You'll look in,” Sheba fussed from out in back
Somewhere, “just like I say. I'll see to that
Right now, or lay this whip to you. You hear?”
The boy just stood.

Abe saw her stomp the trail,
Whip-pointing to a star above the well.
The boy stared back at her. She neared and jabbed
And jabbed him with the whip-end—jabbed. The boy
Glanced up, then at the well, but didn't budge.
She drew the horsewhip back—“Look in,” she
screamed—

And lashed the thong about his hips—again
And yet again. Abe groaned, and strained to rap
The windowpane, but sprawled from chair to floor.
He heard—or did he?—Isaac yelling, “Dad.”
His fingers gripped the floor, his thin legs jerked.
He crawled and crawled but couldn't answer—
crawled,

Crawled to the kitchen porch. He felt his legs
Deaden so again, he couldn't drag ahead.
The whipping stopped. He looked: the boy had hold
The lash. Then Sheba gripped his ear and bending
Forward, twisted him up to the wellhouse curb.
The boy glanced in, writhed back and gasped. She
yanked
His ear back to the curb and shoved. He grabbed

Her hand and yelled. The curb snapped in. They
screamed
From sight.

Abe moaned and gripped the top-step edge
And tugged his body, step by step by step
By step, down to the trail.

“Dad, help me. Water’s
To my chin. You got to quick.”

Abe gouged the trail
And inched ahead, dragging his limp legs
Inch by inch by inch by inch until he groped
The ripped edge of the well, and then the rope
Hitched to the juniper.

Abe fumbled the rope
Down till it slackened, then he waggled it.
It tugged down, tautened. “Dad.”

Abe waited long,
It seemed, his fingers tighter on the rope
To feel it come alive still more and more
Until the boy crawled out into his arms
And snuggled shivering to him on the ground.

“I stood . . . on her . . . down there.” Abe stirred the
rope again:

No tug, no sound from in. “I saw the star . . .
From here . . . down there and wished.” Abe then
hush-fingered

Isaac’s mouth and swabbed the dripping tow hair
smoothe

And looked down in the well for her, but glimpsed
The water’s dark unblurring back the star.

Conrad Pendleton

THE LULLABY OF UNCLE SKULL

Uncle Skull is hunting home, home
with a wonderful knife in his eye—
with a bone through his nose and a thread on his
thumb.

And the world tonight will mime his song,
now Uncle Skull is hunting home.

He walks with a cougar perched on
his brow, with an owl in his heart, with
a snake on his thigh. He walks like a minstrel who's
lost his lute, but he knows a song for
the world to sing: he knows a song

that lacks a tune. He holds a leash
full of starry hounds baying at shades
their eyes reflect. Their kennel's the sky; their quarry
is earth: and Uncle Skull, he holds them
close, for their mouths are sharp; the earth

is lame, and the world is still as
a hiding hare. Open your gullet,
Uncle Skull! Rattle the bones of the mountainside!
Light the seas and let them steam with your
song of songs; let the cougar mewl!

Remember your thumb—let it pluck
the harp of your hilt, the vibrant edge.
Untwist the python. Bid it choke the foolish owl
that hoots and strikes! Come, Uncle Skull. Hum
lullaby, now you've hunted home.

Lewis Turco

YAKUTAT AND SOUTHERN R.R.

Here, where the high-backed bears
Wander like hungry sleep walkers, where salmon
Berries hang like fish eggs from the boughs,
A locomotive flakes away in the rain,
And fungus rises as big as loaves
On flatcars. Symmetrically the rails
Race to a green doom. Alders thrive
As they march up the ties, green drivers and tendrils.

The white men are gone, the rain nibbled
Them away as the salmon spawned
Along the tracks. I see the eggs spilled
Upon the cinders, a hatching of toads for the cannery
men.

The tin cans are stopped with their mouths
Open, the *Iron Chink* bites the air.
The uprights of the goldwatch have caught their
deaths
On time, true and white; while the irresolute, scav-
engers

To the bone, stoked out their lives,
Burning railroad ties with the Indians.
The local poverties drank heavily for a new commerce,
And there was the sound of rust and bankrupt
horizons.

Cemetery, what corpses rode your coffin cars?
Silver salmon and golden men have left
Distorted children; five generations of murder
Have given us tailless fish. Theft

Becomes a pure crime by impossible reclamation.
I am afraid of the rain and alders, their evil

Rejects my criminalities. My bones
Rattle down the track where I fall
Stunned by drops, strangled, root and vine;
Strange berries pulse and swell
Like hearts as the long sentence of nature ends.

Now the Indians have an army truck
With true railroad wheels, tubercular travelers,
Clicking their gold teeth down the track,
A trick they do with drink, down an alder
Warpath, where lungs and boilers die.
I run after them in the name of the verbal man,
Yelling. The thunderbird turned phoenix is there.
Stop, stop. And my voice is eaten by the rain.

John Pym

IN THE FISH HATCHERY

At first this tank appeared like all the rest,
Needled with arrowflights of energy,
But soon a difference was manifest:
The imperfections hurt us, or depressed—
The tails awry, the heads a travesty.

Roe from a single trout will stock a stream,
Millions of fry go pouring into tanks,
And yet we focus on these few who seem
Defrauded: not for them the sunny gleam
Over the shallows, mossiness of banks.

We cannot turn away to contemplate
The normal; we must hover still and stare
At what it is so easy to create
And just as easy to eliminate—
Eager translucent bodies, unaware.

Celeste Turner Wright

SHLUM

for don schenker

from the desk the pencil of light before it sinks
a blazing timber black with perceptible
expulsion of breath & what's left is charred
& seems. The mind a burning shield

the hand entangled in cobwebs the heart
naked & sore: the past top of the laugh
present without motion the childish caravan
future in the back of the brain—all time

here in the body. From what we see
we gather, we hold, we disseminate. Watch
the silence broken by the crash of carapace:
a woman dreaming her bald head wrapped in a scream

shaking her withered fist in rage. A drunk
felled like man by man into pitfall of despair
clutching the bottle half his age
a coin of Puerto-Rican girl black-eyed in white

picks up his pint of lights, the fights
peanuts and pours it out. A mother's voice
from upstairs windows rains forty days rains
malediction with golden hands. In a jewelled box
a bearded dusk is playing the biblical shepherd:

Abraham with his jew of frightened blond-faced boys
chariot of David carved in brick—already bowed
beneath a weight of fear—a masque for synagogues:

pray, knead, unleash this bread. Thank Jehovah
for the one true child with eyes ablaze—his race
holding a heaven of light, with a noise of glory,
joyous

tumbling, clatter of shields. The ashcans

settle on the street. Fill the sky it empties itself.

I am smoking a black cigar. The smoke is blue, the
few

are grey. The view like everyone works for a gleam.
When I come home the walls are damp. My hands I
hold

to a cooking sun splashed with a surplus of paint.
A lacquered Buddha drinks the atmospheric coffee,
the gulls catapulting from brick & stone—I sit
my heart in hangmen's knots, my mind is rusting

choked with a yellow country's dust. It brings me
no riches not even joy—black bread from Russia
gefilte-

fish red California green Wisconsin. In formless
silence. No eye to see, no listening here, no ear, no

hearing aid, a radio blue-green chachacha, no God
(what's up!) to wrestle with. Only because of
struggling

sex, the grass-blade vexed its finger pointing
through the stone, the gingko tree, do we perceive

the silence shaken when it comes. Writing poetry
on the butterknife edge we are thinking backwards

now

my love is smiling through her death. My solution's

a glass of sand turning with speed of the American
dream coming excruciatingly through. St. John
of the Cross walking his eyes on a distant mountain
& laid to rest on twin instruments. Jew & Celt &
Slav

have kissed my lips at last & hung my heart
in its tinselled parts in a frothy bottle of coke.
O brandy leave my balls alone! From the top shelf
of my frigidaire comes religion. On the sea-waves
of my air-conditioner blow politics. Only believing
this creature was not born without lamps in his
pulse.

Down in the street a faceless man leaps on another
to take his life—he'll clothe in tissue from the corner
stall & feed his wife the flesh of another. All fat.

Christopher Perret

HER FATHER IS DRUNK IN THE GRAVEYARD

A hand of stone on top of a tipped tomb
That pointed up to heaven once now points
Straight at my father's slumber where he lies drunk
In wet grass in shade of an upright tomb.

My father's fingers point along the grass
At nothing—unless at a dove who died
Under a bush, its wings outstretched, head squashed,
With father's empty bottle lying beside.

Age or vandals with these slabs have played
In time a crazy kind of dominoes;
Yet no one comes to straighten up the rows
Of tipped or leaning stones where father sleeps.

When they stretch together in wet grass,
Each pointing toward the other, I see
That stone and dove and man's ends are the
same—

What father knew too well would come to pass.

No middle for him: a beginning and end,
An unending ending of his waking life,
A shade drawn daily against the living world,
A walk in blindfold to a borderland,

Where this stateless man sees, or dreams he
sees,
The soft, welcome shadow of his lover
Waiting, secret on the river's other bank,
Arms outstretched, beckoning him softly over.

And there he lies peering over the water,
Weeping, without a passport for his crossing,
Lies on the edge pretending he is dead,
Ears stopped to cries of wife and daughter.

Do all men stray to dark, beyond our cries,
Fiddle with death, and listen to music played
By instruments of their sober trades:
Lawyers drawing wills, the surgeons knives?

Did these vandals race to end of reason
To find life under this life, and dig hard?
Or did they in wild love turn up the yard
To show us nothing is here, nothing at all?

For my husband let me have the vandal
Who will outrage the other life and leap in this,
Who will topple bombs and outrun scandal—
Beat Death in dominoes before we kiss.

Dear dreaming, wasted father, floating
Further each day from my hardening memory,
I will let you slumber here, let you lie
While I move further from you tenderly.
O my dear dying, drunken father, go floating
Softly to her dark, winged kingdom waiting.

Robert W. Watson

POINT OF NO

The new kite flopped,
Cripple-ripped along one edge,
and the big red balloon gaped lewdly.

The toy dresser turned out to be
cardboard, underneath the gloss,
and the china doll had one eye turned
irretrievably awry.

But, squashed low in the fly-moist
garbage can, it was the six thousandth
sardine can
that made the difference.

Genie Rollings Valentine

HORSES

Ours is a town, after all, with cars beetling,
streets and the walks paved, the lawns mowed, the
 young
learning economy, learning our closeness
of heart. That there should be horses! I heard them,
their hooves on the concrete, rapidly cantering—
saw them, saw girls, straight-backed girls in their
 teens,
wearing shorts, their legs bare on the bare and the
 brown,
on the muscular sides, girls with loose hair
lifted by movement, girls with their chins
set proudly, their faces serious as those
of the horses, their flanks as firm, and sweating
along with their horses, whose hooves rocketed,
bounced on the street like granite hail.
I love those girls straddling, love them for loving
their horses. Let there be horses, horses,
between all the young thighs, on all the clean streets,
uneconomically, all through our town!

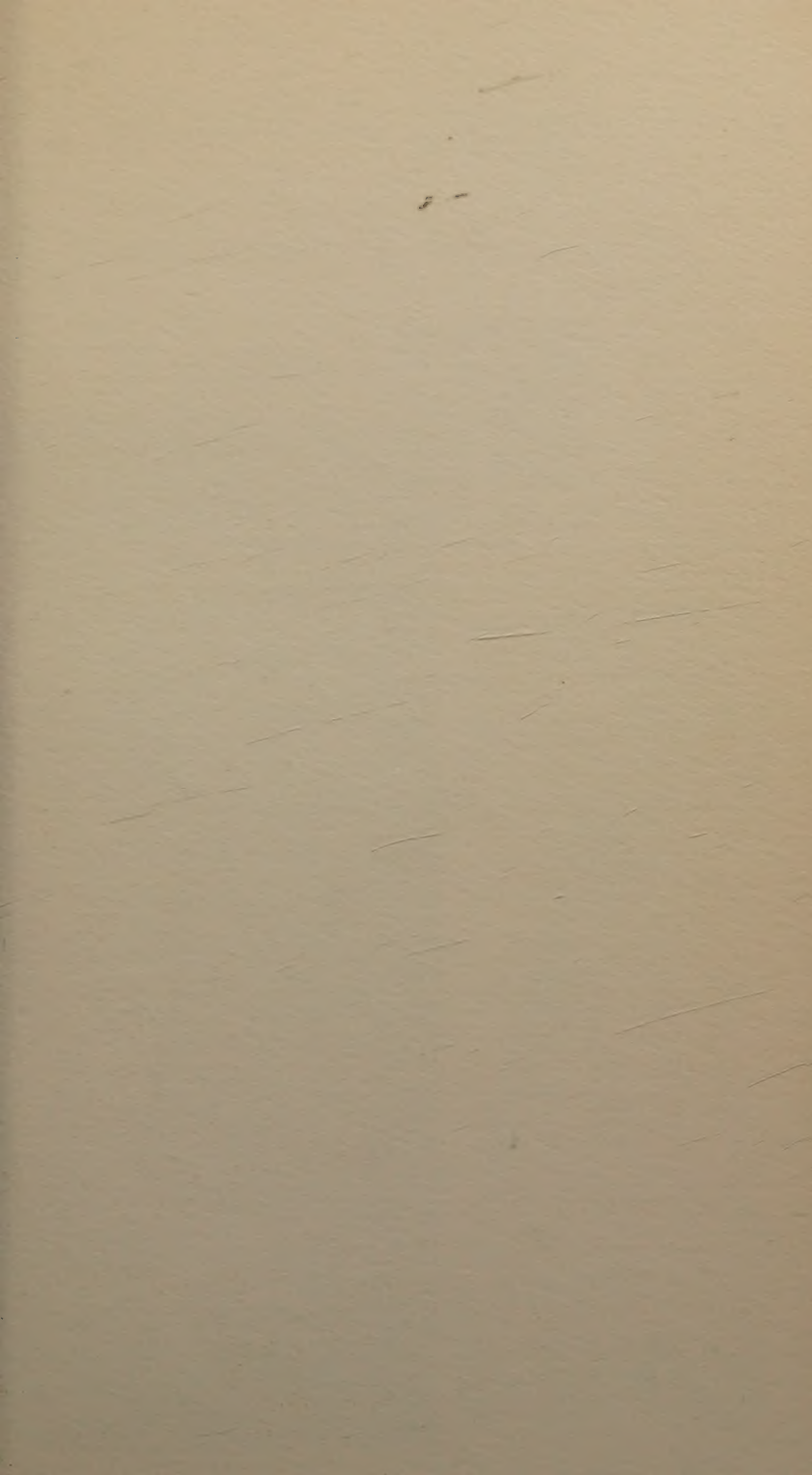
Judson Jerome

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